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ABSTRACT

The idea of multiculturalism in Australian education originated in concepts of educational disadvantage, with special provisions for limited- or non-English-speaking students to achieve equity. The debate, however, soon became a cultural debate, and is now moving toward establishing Australian Studies. The need to ensure equity in education requires some guarantees of equal access to a fairly high level of general education. While ethnic minorities might ask for programs teaching their native languages or cultures, they will not favor any form of multiculturalism which appears, by varying the curriculum, to threaten access or success. The content of a common curriculum which exists in most parts of Australia can be culturally blind. However, content is the most superficial level of curriculum. The most useful form of commonality, and one consistent with a degree of cultural pluralism, may be a commonality of principles and values. In a curriculum consciously based on values, acceptance of democratic pluralism would be reflected in a pedagogy of open inquiry and thoughtful toleration of differences. The non-language areas of a multicultural curriculum should include components reflecting the composition of the student groups, but must teach with a perspective that makes these components accessible and relevant to all students. Successful multicultural curriculum development depends on: (1) resolving apparent conflicts between schools and central authorities; (2) incorporating the views and values of parents and community; and (3) acquiring staff members whose backgrounds and attitudes reflect the plurality of the community. (SV)

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NACCME COMMISSIONED RESEARCH PAPER NO 5

## The Location of Multiculturalism in the Development of Australian Education

by

William Hannan

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NACCME COMMISSIONED RESEARCH PAPER NO. 5

# THE LOCATION OF MULTICULTURALISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION.

BY

WILLIAM HANNAN



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# NATIONAL ADVISORY AND CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE ON MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

## PREFACE

The National Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee on Multicultural Education (NACCME) was established by the Minister for Education (and Youth Affairs), Senator Susan Ryan, on 27 March 1984, following from the Government's acceptance of Recommendation 29 of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs Evaluation of Post-Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants (May 1985).

NACCME's Terms of Reference are to:

(i) advise the Minister for Education on matters relating to multicultural education;

(ii) co-ordinate, monitor and review multicultural programs and activities;

(iii) determine an appropriate procedure for information exchange and put that procedure into practice.

NACCME's main function is to provide advice on the needs of multicultural education across a broad spectrum, from pre-school to higher education and information education mechanisms such as the media. The Commonwealth Department of Education provides the Secretariat for the Committee.

At its inaugural meeting, Senator Ryan suggested that the Committee develop a major policy document on multicultural education, and this was taken up as a major task for NACCME over the past three years. On 26 May 1987 NACCME's policy document Education In and For a Multicultural Society: Issues and Strategies for Policy Making was officially launched.

In developing this major policy document NACCME sought input from outside experts by commissioning a number of background research papers.

NACCME is pleased to now release a series of seven papers comprising eight commissioned research papers which had direct input into our own document.

We hope that these papers will add to the pool of information available on, and constructive discussion of, issues in multicultural education.

The views expressed in these papers are not necessarily those of NACCME itself.

This paper entitled The Location of Multiculturalism in the Development of Australian Education is by William Hannan who is currently the Chairman of the Victorian State Board of Education. The is the fifth paper in the NACCME Commissioned Research Papers Series.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Hannan paper was commissioned after the interest shown in the Manifesto for a Democratic Curriculum, published as a special supplement to The Australian Teacher, February 1984, and prepared by White, Hannan, Blackburn, Ashenden. Mr Hannan was then charged with relating the important principles of curriculum in democratic schools outlined in the Manifesto, to the area of multicultural education.

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BILL HANNAN

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1

# THE LOCATION OF MULTICULTURALISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

The concept of multiculturalism in education has its origins in concepts of educational disadvantage. Special provision for students of non-English speaking background were seen as necessary to achieve equity. The debate, however, soon became a cultural debate, and is now caught up in a move towards establishing Australian Studies.

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The mass elementary schooling initiated in the 1870's combined instruction in the 3 Rs with general knowledge, of literature, history, geography and nature, and with some social improvement, in health and civics. Educational expansion after the second world war brought the masses into contact with high culture in the shape of academic studies derived from higher education.

The spread of people into the academic curriculum did provoke some adaptation of the curriculum in the junior secondary school. The classics declined, and later so did modern languages. Composite general science courses were devised. In some places social studies replaced history and geography. There was an expansion of provision for arts and crafts. The secondary curriculum, in other words, was shaped as a specifically school curriculum just as the primary curriculum had been shaped.

In spite of these adaptations, success in secondary school continued to be judged largely by performance in subjects designed to be introductions to academic disciplines. The emphasis, in the secondary curriculum, in the ethos of secondary schools, in the aspirations of the best regarded students and in the methods used by teachers continued to be academic and to that extent derived from conceptions of a particular facet of the high culture - one moreover which was particularly English rather than Australian, in flavour.

In the 1970s, the concept of educational disadvantage entered the consciousness of schools. The Australian Schools Commission defined the concept largely in terms of socio-economic status and school success. Students from poor families and from working class families were the first targets, but the range soon had added to it students of immigrant families if they were non-English speaking, Aborigines and girls. Disadvantage had become a majority experience, and differences had become defined as deprivations.

In a very short space of time the analysis of disadvantage shifted from the initial notions of deprivation, first economic then by extension cultural, to notions of cultural difference. Aboriginal groups began to be attended to when they asserted that different cultural

backgrounds and assumptions required different educational provisions - black teachers rather than extra white ones trained in remediation. Ethnic groups managed to get multiculturalism on to the funding list. Women began to define the nature of the classrooms in which girls would find themselves at a disadvantage. Theorists published research about the cultural differences of working class children. Debate, in other words, shifted from the material to the cultural.

This shift in conceptualisation has large consequences for the definition of equity. Neither the notion of equality of opportunity nor equality of outcomes sits easily with propositions that education is somehow deeply concerned with cultural identity and ought to be based on particular cultural patterns or knowledge. If one accepts these propositions one must say that in Australian schools a basic education has to establish some balance between an Australian cultural identify which all in some sense share, and a host of particular cultural identities. If those two things can be successfully juggled together rather than put in opposition, then one would presumably have discernibly different outcomes which none the less could be described as equitable.

The counter to this line of thinking is to say that schooling which can perform this feat will turn out simply to be good schooling. By this line of reasoning, the good curriculum is the "inclusive" curriculum, the curriculum which acknowledges and draws on the experiences, background and sense of identity of the whole student group rather than of dominant groups within it. This is certainly a more comforting way of expressing the dilemma.

That issue will remain knotty for a good while to come. A very salient point, however, and one of immediate relevance, is that the question of culture raises the question of particular knowledge. To take account of cultural identity one must go into literature, myth, place, art, history, science and so forth, into areas of particular knowledge. Schools are not all in a good condition to do this. There is a very strong reliance in current educational ideology on the concept of skills which can be abstracted from knowledge and from values. Despite their insistence on the knowledge gained through the "great disciplines" even Right-wing theorists hammer literacy as an abstraction and attack the notion that values should form part of a curriculum. But recoil from both knowledge and values leads to a particular empty relativism. For some time, the skills concept appeared to be a way through the problems of diversity and of equity. The concept, however, does not stand up to a cultural critique. Cultures are based on common knowledge and shared values, and schools are expected to be major agents in passing those on.

Among recent initiatives in this area, one of the most promising could be projects in Australian studies. In spite of what is written above, teachers and the public generally appear to agree broadly on what are the essentials of schooling. Of course they name the basics, but they go beyond it to statements about values and specific knowledge, and among such statements the desirability of the curriculum's being Australian in some positive ways seems to be well accepted. Australian studies could therefore be a cutting edge towards installing content as well as skills within the notion of a common curriculum. It should be said that in their general outlines, curricula across Australia are fairly uniform. Perhaps what is lacking is not so much agreement as coherence.

2

## THE COMMON CURRICULUM ARGUMENT

The disadvantage argument contributes in part to the common curriculum argument. In turn, the common curriculum proposition contains cultural problems.

Briefly the chain of reasoning leading to a common curriculum runs thus:

The need to ensure equity in education - a need made apparent by the perception of educational disadvantage - requires some guarantees of access to a fairly high level of general education as well as some opportunity for training. This level has been steadily rising from the middle of this century and is now advocated as a full span of primary and secondary education, from beginners to Year 12.

To have much meaning, access must be more than formal. It ought not mean access to failure. The educational experience should also be a largely successful one, if only because for at least ten of those twelve years, young people are in fact compelled to be schooled.

Success, therefore, must be coupled to access, as has been done in Victoria's Ministerial Paper on Curriculum Development and Planning in Victoria. But this is still not enough. The success must be in a comprehensive, general education in the compulsory years that leads to higher levels of education and training in the post-compulsory and post-secondary years; in effect a curriculum that is recognisably common. Access to or success in sharply differentiated levels or tracks is not acceptable publicly because the levels and tracks are perceived as hierarchies.

As I have said, the idea that equity requires commonality poses problems of definition in a pluralist society. Before I look at some of the possible solutions to those problems, I want to say that in my opinion the drive for equity is usually much stronger than any drive for a pluralist or multicultural education. By and large, national, ethnic and religious groups only keep separate education going if they can guarantee academic achievement comparable to that of the general run of schools. This has been true of Catholic schools in my view and it is an accurate summary of the aspirations of the non-English speaking groups I have dealt with. Greeks, for example, will be extremely active in asking for or in setting up programs of instruction in Greek. They will also favour elements of Greek culture - especially history - being incorporated into school courses. But they will not tolerate any perceived lowering of general academic standards and if they have to choose between programs advancing Greek culture and programs advancing academic success in narrowly Australian terms, they will choose the latter. The culture after all, they will say, can be looked after by the home or the church. Thus no form of multiculturalism which appears, by varying the curriculum, to threaten access or success is likely to be seen as worthwhile.

3

## LEVELS OF COMMONALITY IN CURRICULUM

Content is the most superficial level of curriculum. The most useful form of commonality, and one consistent with a degree of cultural pluralism, may be commonality of principles and values.

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The traditional way of defining curriculum is to specify its content. English should cover so much grammar, so much vocabulary, so much literature, and so on. A common curriculum in those terms, therefore, consists of a series of subject contents: in English, languages, history, geography, mathematics, science, art, music, physical education, practical studies. Such a curriculum with relatively minor variations exists in most parts of Australia and no doubt in many other parts of the world. Such a curriculum, however, if it is centrally prescribed can be culturally blind or even culturally oppressive. This is in fact the curriculum which has been said to disadvantage and to exclude girls, Aborigines, recent immigrants and working people.

To some extent, the naming of certain areas of content is unavoidable Even if one names very broad areas of study, such as communication or technology or the study of society, the content areas one eventually covers in practice turn out to be something like the ten named above. This turns out to be true even of integrated courses, for they can usually be broken down on analysis into much the same list of subjects which are being held together by a common theme or a common activity.

To see the curriculum as a set of areas of knowledge is not, however, to require a particular content in each area. English, for example, can be broadly defined as learning to read and write. Particular methods of learning can also be specified, as can particular criteria for assessment. But what is to be written about or what is to be read can be left to the discretion of a particular class. Advice can of course be given, and that advice can attempt to include texts appropriate to students of different backgrounds and it can being to teachers' notice the variety of responses or styles they may come across in students' writing. But neither the texts nor the styles need to be prescribed in order to maintain standards or organize school systems or certificates. There is in other words a level of pedagogical principle which can be genuinely common and may be sufficient to constitute a common curriculum.

In my view, however, this is still a relatively superficial level at which to specify a curriculum. A more significant level from a cultural point of view may be the level of values and school ethos (by ethos I mean the institutional rhetoric and practices which set or reinforce the values communicated in the classroom - one may talk of a "competitive ethos", a "christian ethos" and so forth). In Australian society, for example, it would seem to be especially important that

democratic values inform teaching and that the school as a whole uphold a democratic ethos. This is probably a value which would set a limit on pluralism at the same time as it permitted a considerable range of cultural difference.

Tolerance, impartiality, justice, respect, integrity, honesty, to name more obvious values at random, are similarly ones which both permit and yet ultimately circumscribe cultural plurality. Indeed, as I see it, such values if consciously held and pursued will resolve the apparent paradox of a pluralistic common culture. I am not of course assuming that all people interpret such concepts in the same way - their interpretations in practice can appear quite opposed. They are, however, the basis for dialogue and can legitimately be given as ideals towards which schooling may be directed. And in a democracy, it seems reasonable to focus many such values as those necessary to a democratic temper. They are, in brief, binding values and hence the basis of commonality in a pluralist society.

My chief purpose here is not to argue which values may contribute to commonality, but to point out that a curriculum both embodies values and is influenced by a school's ethos, and that values therefore may be the deepest level of curriculum. This view has long been the kernel of much private school philosophy, which has emphasised school spirit, preparation for moral leadership and training in both civic and religious virtue. In recent times the view has been strongly advanced in progressive circles where it has been asserted that the "hidden curriculum" of values is the most powerful part of the curriculum. This assertion has now been absorbed into general curriculum debate and reforming schools now place much emphasis on making the values underlying studies explicit by engaging students and parents with teachers in evaluating, negotiating and developing curriculum.

What would have to be emphasized in a curriculum consciously based on values is the relation of pedagogy to the teaching and learning about values. There will of course be values implicit in the choice of subject matter, particularly if the choice is very biased culturally, but more important than the selection of content will be the manner in which the values underlying the content are treated. If the framework of the school's thinking is an acceptance of democratic pluralism, the pedagogy of the school must be one of open enquiry and of thoughtful toleration of differences. Thus, even though the content of courses may never reflect the full diversity of a pluralistic culture - which it probably never will - the values implicit in pedagogy must be those which are seen to be essential to the survival of a pluralistic society.

4

## INCLUSIVENESS

The analysis of disadvantage coupled with moves towards commonality have produced the notion of inclusiveness, a notion which attempts to reconcile commonality and pluralism.

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One of the dominant analyses of disadvantage in recent years has been that of the inclusion of girls in curriculum. Within the women's movement in education there was a rapid shift - over the space of a few years - from advocacy of women's studies as a component of curriculum to advocacy of the principle that all components of the curriculum should consciously include the experience of women. Thus the study of history, to take a common example, should be deliberately shaped to incorporate the frequently obscured role of women in the evolution of society. Or, to take another common example, the study of Mathematics should be organized to ensure that it touches equally on girls' and boys' experiences which in that area appear to be significantly different.

Elements of this analysis could be applied to multicultural education. Certainly, "multicultural" studies other than languages could be seen as comparable to "women's studies", and the idea of inclusiveness might be a fruitful way of thinking about how to incorporate or mirror diverse cultural experiences in a curriculum.

An important difference however is that the women's argument is generally seen to concern a single, large group - girls - whereas the multicultural argument envisages many small groups having to be accommodated. An inclusive curriculum for a multicultural school population would have to be very adaptable to local circumstances. Its development therefore will need to be very much in the "school-based" styles that are still evolving around Australia.

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5

## CONCEPTUALISING A MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM

A multicultural curriculum needs to consider both components and perspectives.

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One common way of expressing the idea of inclusiveness is to say that multiculturalism is a "cross-curricular" issue. Another is to say that the whole curriculum - or specified major parts of it - should embody multicultural "perspectives". These are terms used also in talking of Australian studies, women's studies and Aboriginal studies. The

cross-curricular idea actually arose some decades ago in connection with English language teaching. It might also be seen as a long standing idea in religious and moral education..

This is a useful, but not entirely adequate way of conceptualising multiculturalism. The chief problem of consigning any element of a curriculum to a "cross-curricular" or "perspectives" role is that it is too easy for that element to be lost. This is why English survives as a separate study despite the logical argument that every study requires English and every teacher is a teacher of English. The logic sounds right, but in practice it becomes an empty rhetoric. The deliberate, systematic and necessary study of English would vanish under such a pursuation, and schools are not willing to let that happen.

Despite this, the logic of the idea is persuasive enough to justify persisting with trying to find ways of making "cross-curricular" approaches work. I would suggest, however, that distinctions are worth making within the idea, and that these might help to evolve workable approaches.

The first distinction to make is between what must stand alone in multicultural education and what may be regarded as cross-curricular. In my view, language must stand alone. For those students who have a non-English speaking background, a continued study of their language of origin is by far the most potent contribution secular schooling can make to the maintaining of their cultural identity. And for students of English-speaking background the study of another language stands as one of the most effective ways of expanding one's cultural horizons. Languages, therefore, must stand alone in their own right in a curriculum.

Language programs can of course be cross-curricular in bi-lingual schools, but they work to the extent that the various components of the whole curriculum are planned to be in one or other of the languages. That is to say, the stronger the definition of each component is, the more likely the program is to succeed.

This example suggests a second distinction, namely that the non-language areas of the curriculum should be conceived in terms of "components" and "perspectives". A "component" is a section of the content. A "perspective" is a particular view of that content. Let us take English as an example. A typical component of an English course is literature. Generally speaking in Australia, this is English, Australian and American literature. For a largely Australian-born school population it could be argued that this usual selection needs to be regularly reviewed according to certain guidelines or perspectives: the balance of Australian literature, the balance of literature by or about women, and within those categories the balance of literature reflecting the diversity and plurality of Australian society.

In a school with a population of mixed background it could be argued that the literature component should be broken down further into several components deliberately reflecting the broad composition of the student group. Thus, there may be a component of Greek literature but taught with a perspective which sought to make it accessible and relevant to a range of students.

It is not hard to image the distinction applying to most school studies in the humanities area in.

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6

## DERIVING A CURRICULUM: SCHOOL AND CENTRE

The success of multicultural education depends to an important degree on the resolution of apparent conflicts between school-based and centralised curriculum development.

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Most states in Australia have been through what they regard as a period of school-based curriculum development. I say "regard", because I believe the term "school-based" represented very different realities in each State.

Some States now say that they have turned their backs on school-based development and gone back to centralised control. Others have committed themselves further to school-based development. At the moment New South Wales and Victoria could be taken as examples of the two directions.

It must be said that in general school-based curriculum development in virtually all states has been more laissez-faire than deliberate. It is only now being widely conceded that school-based development and central development are not necessarily opposites and probably need to be complementary. That is to say, the most productive school level development will generally occur when there is good advice and strong support being provided by central authorities which can provide resources and maintain some overview of developments. Individual schools often lack the knowledge or stimulus and nearly always lack the time to review, evaluate and reform their own curricula. Their role in development will be much more effective if they can rely on support. To be able to provide such support, however, implies the existence of an overall, common framework of curriculum, of which agreed policies on multiculturalism in principle and practice would be a part. Leaving aside those special cases of inspired innovative schools, it is likely that the role of the majority of schools would be to adapt and interpret these general agreements to their particular circumstances.

7

## DERIVING A CURRICULUM: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The most secure basis for developing a multicultural curriculum will probably be the views of the parental community.

Between 1980 and 1985 the Brunswick Secondary Education Council undertook a number of soundings of the views of parents in the district about schooling and set up a very ambitious consultative and support mechanism designed to amplify those views and impress them upon the schools of the district. I took part in these projects, and the experience persuaded me of five things about education in a very diverse, multicultural community:

i Communities with the backgrounds represented in Brunswick hold coherent philosophies of schooling which are considerably at odds with the philosophies of the local schools.

ii When given a chance to influence curriculum, study of their languages of origin is far and away those communities' most insistent demand.

iii Any other demands about curriculum take second place to the demand that the school reinforce the general moral ideals of the home, as reflected in such matters as attendance, behaviour, deligence and respect.

iv The equity question must be resolved if schools are to retain credibility - that is, they must be seen to be striving for academic success (especially for boys!). However, within that constraint, a general education is prized.

v Schools seriously misinterpret parental motives and actions and prejudge students' ability on the basis of their being "migrants".

What this very concentrated example of cultural demands on a school system means for Australian communities generally I cannot say. It must be noted, too, that although the points above hold true for all ethnic groups then in Brunswick each group emphasised different points more strongly than others and each group acted differently in providing for such matters as language and religious instruction out of their own resources.

That said, however, several points stand out. One is that communities if given a voice can confront schools with cultural challenges (and if the schools respond positively they quickly earn respect). Another is that language provision sticks out as the central curricular component in the cultural demands of non-English speaking groups. A third is the importance given to questions of moral formation and school ethos. Thus, processes of consultation, the teaching of language, and the congruence of school ethos with community values would seem to be crucial issues for schools in a multicultural society.

8

## DERIVING A CURRICULUM: STAFF

Things are easier if staff backgrounds, support and attitudes reflect the plurality of the community.

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There is no doubt that the easiest way to have a good curriculum is to have good teachers. This truism is probably a reflection of the importance, perhaps the primacy, of values in a curriculum. Good teachers are not usually perceived as technicians so much as exemplary personalities within their field - as enthusiasts for learning, as fair, tolerant, helpful, concerned with their students' welfare.

In the Brunswick studies mentioned above, the collaboration of teachers of non-English speaking background was indispensable, as subsequently were the services of liaison officers drawn from the various groups represented in the community. The value of such staff members and assistants was in fact so marked that the schools endorsed a request to the Education Department that bi-lingual staff where possible be appointed to the school. This was not so that language programs could be extended but so that the cultural knowledge of such staff could influence the curriculum and the school ethos. It was simply a case of the students seeing their cultures represented among the staff and of all staff mixing in a culturally diverse peer group and learning by daily interaction.

Again, it is not clear how such practices, possible in a particular community, can be applied generally. Except in fairly clear-cut cases the question of staff mix probably has to be left to chance. It is, however, a vitally important issue in some communities in Australia, Aborigines being the most notable example but not the only one.

The question of specialised support, however, to assist parents and students and to advise school staff on cultural questions can be tackled generally through the various systems of consultancy that operate in all States. Organized in-service too can be consistently promoted and create teachers on staff who are prepared to keep an eye on the values and perspectives implied in the school curriculum.

9

## A POSSIBLE CURRICULUM

If there were a school whose population corresponded roughly to the mix now in the Australian population as a whole, and if that school were making a conscious effort to develop a multicultural curriculum, what would its curriculum be like?

The first thing we would notice about that curriculum would probably be its similarity to what we would regard as a successful curriculum now - that is a curriculum which retained its students through twelve years and was seen to be preparing them well for work, training and further education. In short, it would reflect a general ideal common to all schools in the country. So it would be strong in English, Mathematics, History, Art, Music, Physical Education, Technological studies and so on.

It would also have a strong program in one or more languages other than English, articulated through primary and secondary school. It would have well organized arrangements to encourage students with a home language not taught at school to study their language at some centre. This study would be acknowledged and credited by the school.

Beyond that, nothing much would be evident from looking at the framework of the curriculum. To scratch deeper you would need to find out what was done in certain courses. History would be a good one to take (although these days in Australian schools it may be hard to find). This history course would have a strong Australian component planned into its broad pattern, and that component would show how Australian society originates many thousands of years ago, how European settlement consisted of successive migrations and how all of these diverse groups adapt to historical circumstance to produce the various cultures that make up contemporary Australian society. The Aboriginal Australian, the English-Australian, the Irish-Ausralian, the Italian-Australian are some of the people of this history.

If you lift your eyes from the details of curriculum to look at the people in the school you should, however, see people who are confident of being Australian no matter what their backgrounds. This doesn't mean that the school has somehow brainwashed them into thinking that there are no differences among them and no conflicts between their peoples, but it does mean that in that school at least, everyone gets a fair go and as many as possible give as good as they get. The school, in short, follows the democratic faith and stamps out manifestations of intolerance and injustice.

Finally, you will observe that these people have developed at least some of their confidence from working together in democratic ways. They make decisions together, and they have ways of asking their community to take part in making policies. They try to fit in rather than impose. Certainly they present clear and definite propositions for policy, but they make it plain that they respect people's rights to disagree with a policy and to have it changed.

Perhaps this doesn't sound much when it is laid out briefly. But to achieve any of those three aims - to organise language teaching, to have key components and overall perspectives of courses reflect the nature of Australia's people and to bind people together with common, liberating values - would be a substantial accomplishment. To achieve them all may be more than we can presently expect.